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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the College Career Liaison (CCL) Model at Colorado State University nearly a decade after implementation. The CCL model has evolved into an effective and efficient method of delivering career services and has proved to be a method that bridges gaps within student and academic affairs; maximizes dollars; provides a stronger method of job development; and produces strong collaborative ventures among colleges. The CCL provides the best of both centralized and decentralized organizational structures of career services. Six of the eight colleges have liaison counselors. There is equal funding of these positions between the Career Center and the College. Five areas were addressed in a January 2000 review of the program: academic affairs satisfaction; student satisfaction; increased job and internship postings; increased numbers of group presentations; and successful collaborative ventures across colleges. The CCL has developed specific strategy or action steps to help facilitate implementation of a liaison model with universities. Suggested steps include: identifying all persons who would participate in implementation of the model; form focus groups to explore what students and college faculty desire in their particular unit; establish a commitment to a collaborative venture; and select a liaison with a relevant background. (MKA)

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Introduction

Much has been written about different liaison models over the past decade. Among the most well know is Colorado State University's College Career Liaison (CCL) program. In light of the many evolving phases of Career Services throughout the years, the CCL stands as one of the newest practices and one of the better designs for career service delivery.

After nearly a decade of implementation, the CCL now has data to support it's effectiveness in providing exceptional programming for the future of Career Centers. This article is the first from CSU about the effectiveness and staff opinions of the CCL.

The CCL has provided much evidence of bridging the student and academic affairs gap, maximizing dollars in the ever dwindling higher education budgets, better job development statistics, and strong collaborative ventures. If you are a student or academic affairs professional, a faculty member, an advocacy or advising office member or a staff member of a career center, this article will assist you in moving toward this proven method of effective career service delivery.

The Liaison Model

The Colorado State University Career Center began organizing along a liaison model structure in 1993. The liaison model is a centralized/decentralized organizational structure that incorporates the specialization and college specific knowledge of a decentralized structure with the economics of scale and team strength of a centralized structure. The centralized Career Center houses the recruiting and employer relations functions (on-campus interviews, job postings, resume referrals and job development), career development counseling (particularly for open option students and non-liaison colleges), technology management and training, and administrative management. These positions are all centrally funded out of the Career Center budget.

In six of the eight colleges at Colorado State University, a Career Center Liaison provides career counseling specifically targeted to students of that college. The liaison positions are funded equally by the Career Center and College, with the liaison having a dual reporting relationship to the Director of the Career Center and an Associate or Assistant Dean of the College.

Initially the job descriptions for all six liaison positions were identical, differing only in specific degree and/or work experience required. However, each liaison has modified his or her

position to meet the needs of the respective college. For example, the Natural Science liaison is involved in K-12 outreach, the Agricultural liaison coordinates most on-campus interviews within the college, the Liberal Arts liaison works closely with the college to provide alumni panels, the Natural Resource liaison coordinates two annual Natural Resource Fairs, the Business Liaison hosts a mock interview day with corporate recruiters as the interviewers, and the Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences liaison manages the college's in-house database for veterinary jobs and externships.

In February of 2000, the CSU Career Center completed a thorough Program Review for the University. The data collected in this process revealed evidence to support the liaison model in five areas.

- **Academic affairs satisfaction**. As part of the review process, the liaisons developed and distributed a standard college satisfaction survey to the deans, department chairs, academic faculty members and staff within their colleges. It included survey questions about liaison services and the centralized Career Center services. Satisfaction proved to be very high among those who were aware of the liaison and had used their services. This positive association carried over to the survey questions directed at services provided by the central Career Center.
- **Student satisfaction**. Until the Program Review there was no standardized method in place to measure student satisfaction of Career Center services, although individual counselors were using various evaluations. For the review, a student satisfaction survey form was added to the Career Center webpage. The results indicated positive satisfaction of the liaison services. Students from non-liaison colleges tended to have a lower level of satisfaction with the services they received.
- **Increased job and internship postings**. A yearly comparison of jobs posted to the Career Center's web-based system showed a significant increase of postings for all colleges for the 10 year period reported. Closer analysis of the yearly comparison clearly reflected significant increases in postings the years following the addition of a liaison in the respective college.
- **Increased numbers of group presentations**. The data collected for the Program Review on presentations and workshops covered a six-year comparison. In 1994, the number of students served in this format was 2,495. For the 1998-99 school year the students served by class or group presentations rose to 13,433. There were many factors that came into play in this increase, but a definite influence was the fact that liaisons increased the number of classroom presentations as relationships with faculty developed.
- **Successful collaborative ventures across colleges**. While preparing reports for the Program Review, it became apparent that many of the more successful special events planned through the Career Center were collaborative ventures that required programming across several colleges. For example, the Colleges of Business, Natural Sciences, Engineering and the Career Center worked together on a corporate sponsored Professional Development Workshop (PDW). The PDW provided minority and women students an informal forum to learn about the corporate culture of sponsoring companies while learning specific job search skills. The liaisons and job development personnel in the Career Center spearheaded this event, working closely with faculty and staff in the various colleges and with the corporate sponsors.

Within Your University Start up Strategy or Action Plan to Begin Implementing a Liaison Model

1. Realizing that there needs to be a "buy in" by all parties involved, a first step must be **to identify all persons who would participate in the implementation of the model.** Suggested persons might include: student affairs and academic affairs, students, faculty, advising staff, deans and assistant deans and career center personnel.
2. Form **focus groups** to determine exactly what students and specific colleges want and Expect from their university career center. One certain outcome is that each college Will emphasize very different career needs. For example, some colleges will have a Much greater interest in job development and others will expect heavy student Programming.
3. **Next comes a commitment to a collaborative venture,** which includes an investment from both units, Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. This phase must include agreement by all parties that a liaison model is the model of choice in comparison to a centralized or decentralized model.
4. **Select a liaison with a relevant background** in the given college, or substantial experience or interest in the disciplines offered in the college. The search committee should reflect representatives from the Career Center and the college.

In reviewing the liaison model, the authors conducted interviews with the current Career Center director and her immediate supervisor in student affairs, all liaisons, counselors and other staff within the career center. With each group or individual, the authors asked for the perceived strengths and weaknesses of this model. They also asked for recommendations on how the model could be improved.

The strengths listed included: stronger academic collaboration; services closer to the student population; the ability to share resources and ideas; the ability to have a larger staff and additional support staff in the colleges, knowing the key players in the colleges for more effective programming.

Weakness included: problems for the liaisons associated with having two supervisors; an increased workload for the liaisons because of demands from the college and the career center; feelings of isolation and lack of inclusion expressed by both career center counselors and liaisons; occasional disjointed programming, especially in the area of job development.

Other challenges career center directors may face include issues of inequality among career liaison staff such as office space, clerical support, computer budgets, etc. A feeling of unfairness or favoritism could develop due to some colleges supporting the CCL more generously than others. Colleges may demand additional work from designated liaisons, while the Career Center expects the liaisons to fulfill their other counseling functions. The CC Director must be vigilant in assisting liaisons to sort out priorities. The CC Director must also monitor what the liaison is being asked to do by the college. It is important that both the career center and the college agree on the yearly goals of the liaison. A redirection in responsibilities should require a discussion by all parties involved. Strong leadership from the career center is essential to the success of this program. It is paramount that a CC Director understands the variety of challenges and the need for constant monitoring, not unlike a business manager who coordinates and oversees numerous regional offices.

During the past seven years there has been a progressive shift in liaison responsibilities. During the early years there was more pure career counseling. As the needs of both the CC and the colleges evolved, a more recent shift has been toward more emphasis on job development. Because of this change, more coordination of job development is necessary, which will require a new administrative position within the Career Center to oversee recruiting and job development functions.

Summary

In summary, the College Career Liaison (CCL) Model at Colorado State University has evolved into a tested model of effective and efficient method of delivering career services. The model has proved be a method to bridge gaps within student and academic affairs, maximize dollars, provide a stronger method of job development and produce strong collaborative ventures among colleges.

The CCL provides the best of both the centralized and decentralized organizational structures of career services. Six of the eight colleges at CSU now have liaison counselors. There is equal funding of these positions between the Career Center and the college. The liaisons have all modified their positions over the last seven years to meet the needs of the respective colleges.

In a recent review process completed in January 2000, five areas were addressed: 1) Academic affairs satisfaction, 2) Student satisfaction, 3) Increased job and internship postings, 4) Increased numbers of group presentations, and 5)Successful collaborative ventures across colleges.

The CCL has developed specific strategy or action steps to help facilitate implementation of a liaison model within your university. Suggested steps include: 1) Identifying all person who would participate in the implementation of the model 2) Form focus groups to explore what students and college faculty desire in their particular unit 3) establish a commitment to a collaborative venture 4) Select a liaison with a relevant background.

Extensive interviewing of Career Center Director, Vice President of Student Affair, current and former liaisons, generalist counselors, and career center staff to discuss and explore the model's strengths and weaknesses as well as other challenges which the director of such a model faces in management issues.

Conclusion

The success of CSU's liaison model is it's ability to stay fluid and attentive to the needs of the current economy, changing academic policies, growth and decline of college populations and increasing demands for the Career Center's dynamic programs. After nearly a decade, we believe that the liaison model fits a large university such as Colorado State University. With the current strong leadership, support from student affairs and the supportive college commitment, the CCL will continue to develop and meet the needs effectively for future students.

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